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Nonverbal communication is any symbolic activity that communicates a message other than words. This definition covers a very wide range of topics: facial expression, hand movements, dress, tattoos, jewelry, physical attractiveness, timing of what happens, distance, tone of voice, eye movements, the positioning of furniture to create atmosphere, touch, and smell—and that is not an exhaustive list.

Nonverbal communication is used differently by different cultures. In Mediterranean cultures, especially Italian, it is used as a perpetual accompaniment of speech with much arm and hand movement as well as facial expressions changing for emphasis and clarity. However, it is a mistake to resign nonverbal communication to only special cultural examples.

Nonverbal communication is always present during face-to-face interactions and carries messages over and above the words you speak. For example, a smile makes your words seem friendly, but a sneer makes the same words seem sarcastic. Nonverbal communication may go along with verbal communication, but not always. You might say, “I’m not angry,” but look as if you are really angry. Or you might say, “I love you,” and only have to exchange a glance with your partner for him or her to see that you really mean it. Accordingly, nonverbal communication frames talk and helps you determine its meaning.

Nonverbal communication can also frame other people’s assessments and judgments of you and your identity, your status and power, and your sincerity in what you say. It can further indicate how you feel about other people. The way you move, look, and sound conveys relational messages to others. All nonverbal communication conveys something about your sense of relaxation and comfort with the person with whom you are speaking. Nonverbal communication also indicates your evaluation or assessment of that person. In short, nonverbal communication is an essential relational element of all interaction, and you cannot have interactions without nonverbal communication; nor can you have interactions without the relational messages that nonverbal communication sends.

Nonverbal communication has been tied up with your communication all of your life, so it might be difficult to fully appreciate its importance. However, consider difficulties that may arise when nonverbal cues are absent, such as when texting, sending an e-mail, or making comments on social networking sites. Even if that example does not convince you, the value in understanding nonverbal communication will soon become apparent as you read this chapter. Increasing

Nonverbal communication: any symbolic activity other than the use of language Other
your understanding of nonverbal communication may also increase your effectiveness in interpreting the messages of others and in conveying your own messages.

**Misconceptions About Nonverbal Communication**

Even though it might be difficult to consider the importance of nonverbal communication and people sometimes take it for granted, some widely held misconceptions about nonverbal communication exist. We should clear those up before moving forward. However, these misconceptions are so ingrained, you may have trouble believing that they are not true. And because academics do not always agree, even your instructor may have other ideas. Some advice: If it comes up on an examination, go with your instructor’s view and not ours. Your grade point average will thank you! Nevertheless, here are some misconceptions about nonverbal communication, you may have encountered.

**Misconception One: 93% of Meaning Comes From Nonverbal Communication**

We will start with a big one. It is frequently stated by well-meaning instructors and textbook authors along with not-so-well-meaning “image consultants,” “communication coaches,” and self-help book authors that 93% (or some other high number) of meaning comes from nonverbal communication. This statement is usually provided by instructors and textbook authors to convey the importance of nonverbal communication and by those other people to sell their “services” or books. The truth is, it is not true.

Do not get us wrong, nonverbal communication is important, it is just impossible to put a number on it, or anything for that matter. And, in some cases, more meaning might come from nonverbal communication, but in other cases, more meaning might come from verbal communication.

Like many misconceptions and myths, this one has an origin that has been widely misunderstood. It is based on two experiments conducted more than a half-century ago by a psychologist, Albert Mehrabian (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). His findings indicated that 7% of meaning came from words, 38% of meaning came from tone of voice, and 55% of meaning came from body movement. So, 93% of meaning comes from nonverbal.

However, there were a host of problems with these studies. Among many other problems, he was only looking at emotional words, participants based responses after hearing only a single word, the number of participants was extremely small, and the experiment was conducted in an artificial, unnatural way.

Even though that number is untrue regardless of the situation, in his defense, Mehrabian only ever claimed it involved emotional words (or “word” in the case of the experiment). Plus, he really disliked that his research had been misinterpreted so broadly. He has been quoted saying, “I am obviously uncomfortable about misquotations of my work. From the very beginning, I have tried to give people the correct limitations of my findings. Unfortunately, the field of self-styled ‘corporate image consultants’ or ‘leadership consultants’ has numerous practitioners with very little psychological expertise” (quoted in Atkinson, 2005, p. 345). When asked if it were true that 93% of meaning is nonverbal, he maintained, “Of course not. And every
time I hear my results being quoted in this way, I cringe inside. It must be obvious to anyone with a little bit of common sense that this cannot be right” (quoted in De Bruyckere, Kirschner, & Hulshof, 2015, p. 82).

So, there is no particular percentage of meaning derived from nonverbal communication. However, it is important and worth our attention.

**Misconception Two: Some Nonverbal Communication Is Universally Understood**

Another misconception about nonverbal communication, and one about which academics may even disagree, is that some nonverbal communication is universally understood. That is simply not true.

However, it is easy to see why people might believe that it is true. No matter where you go in the world, you will probably see people with similar facial expressions. And, there are some innate nonverbal behaviors, such as shivering perhaps when a person is cold or frightened and the flushing of cheeks when experiencing some emotions or an illness.

Yet, there exist no universally understood nonverbal behaviors. Some nonverbal behaviors and symbols are perhaps universally recognized (the smile, for example), but they do not necessarily have universal meaning in the same contexts. Even within a single culture, those behaviors can have vastly different meanings. Further, there may be similarities among nonverbal behaviors, but there are subtle differences among different cultural groups (Elfenbein, 2013).

**Misconception Three: Deception Can Be Accurately Detected Through Nonverbal Communication**

As with nonverbal communication being universally understood, people tend to believe that certain nonverbal communication will consistently reveal deception (Global Deception Research Team, 2006). So persistent is this belief that when attempting to spot a liar, some people become so focused on trying to determine deceit by overserving nonverbal communication, they overlook such other factors as what they are actually saying or reasons why they might be lying (Bond, Howard, Hutchinson, & Masip, 2013; Masip & Herrero, 2014). There was even a television program about someone able to detect deception, and so-called experts advertise the ability to determine whether someone is being honest or dishonest. If this belief were true, of course, no poker player would ever be able to bluff and con artists as well as many politicians would be out of business. And, beyond outright lies, what about all of those times when you “hid” your real feelings, such as pretending to be happy when you were really upset?

The truth is that no particular nonverbal behavior (eye movement, facial expression, vocal cues, or anything else) consistently reveals deception. However, that does not prevent people from believing that it is possible. In fact, people tend to believe they are better at spotting liars than they really are, which probably is advantageous for the liars. Yet, people have nearly as good of a chance of determining deceit by simply guessing as they would by trying to determine it by focusing on nonverbal communication, and even people such as police officers and others whose job would benefit from the ability to spot a liar are no better at doing so than the general population (Aamodt & Custer, 2006; Bond & DePaulo, 2006; Vrij, 2008).

In a completely unrelated matter, your authors would like to talk with you about reasonably priced oceanfront property in Iowa...
Misconception Four: People Read Nonverbal Communication

This final misconception may just be a matter of word choice rather than something about which people are completely wrong. People do assign meaning to nonverbal communication as they do with verbal communication. However, nonverbal communication does not involve language and cannot be read; it has no grammar. Nevertheless, the phrase “reading people like a book” still exists.

This argument might seem to be a whole lot about nothing at all. After all, people who talk about reading nonverbal communication probably do not mean it literally. The problem, though, is when people attempt to exploit this misconception for a profit. There are many books by so-called nonverbal communication experts who claim to be able to teach people to read people like a book or teach the secrets to reading “body language.” Such experts also hire themselves out to media outlets to “analyze” the “body language” of celebrities and politicians. They are really not reading nonverbal communication and are probably not any better at assigning meaning to nonverbal communication than anyone else.

What Is Nonverbal Communication?

Though a definition of nonverbal communication was provided earlier, a more complete examination is needed to better understand and appreciate it. As we engage in a deeper exploration of nonverbal communication, we will address the characteristics it shares with verbal communication. For instance, both verbal and nonverbal communication are symbolic and share many of the same characteristics, such as being personal, ambiguous, guided by rules, and linked to culture. We also discuss characteristics unique to nonverbal communication, such as its continuous nature and that it is often beyond our full control. This comparison will help you understand the workings of nonverbal communication and should add to your understanding of verbal communication, with which it often occurs.

Symbolic

Nonverbal communication involves the use of symbols. Accordingly, everything we discuss about symbols in Chapter 1 applies to nonverbal communication. In this regard, nonverbal communication and verbal communication are alike, with both being symbolic. The key difference between them is that verbal communication involves the use of language and nonverbal communication involves all other symbolic activity.

Decoding and Encoding

Nonverbal communication requires decoding and encoding. Decoding is the act of assigning meaning to nonverbal symbols. When decoding a nonverbal message, you draw meaning from something you observe. For example, if somebody

**decoding:** the act of assigning meaning to nonverbal symbols you receive
Table 5.1  Characteristics of Effective Decoding

Effective decoders attend to whether others pay attention to nonverbal communication and seem to understand it. A skilled decoder will determine whether the person with whom he or she is interacting seems to pick up on nonverbal cues being provided.

Effective decoders bond with others and watch for signals others send about comfort in the situation. A skilled decoder will notice when a speaker is anxious and will smile more often or reward the speaker with head nods and encouraging nonverbal communication to put him or her at ease.

Effective decoders coordinate with others and respond to cues so the interaction runs smoothly with no awkward silences.

Effective decoders detect the undercurrents of a speaker’s talk by attending carefully to eye movements and gestures that “leak” what the speaker truly feels.

Table 5.2  Characteristics of Effective Encoding

Effective encoders affirm others through encoding approval and liking while talking. Examples of this behavior include smiling and maintaining eye contact.

Effective encoders blend their nonverbal communication with their verbal communication to allow for consistency between what is spoken and what is conveyed nonverbally.

Effective encoders are direct by striving to make their nonverbal communication clear and as unambiguous as possible.

Effective encoders exhibit emotional clarity so that the emotions of their words are matched by their nonverbal expression of emotion.
and piercings, as well as general surroundings such as the arrangement of furniture or the color of the walls. Although some of these things may change during an interaction, most often they do not change.

Guided by Rules

Nonverbal communication is guided by rules. Rules guide the choice of nonverbal symbols that should be used in specific situations and with certain people. The appropriateness of greeting someone with a kiss depends on whether he or she is your romantic partner, an attendant behind the counter at a gas station, or someone from a culture where a kiss on the cheek is an accepted greeting even between persons of the same sex (Russia or Italy, for example). Rules also guide evaluation of nonverbal behavior. A brisk handshake is evaluated differently than a hearty handshake; a slight smile is evaluated differently than a broad smile (Hillewaert, 2016).

Compared with those guiding verbal communication, the rules guiding nonverbal communication are learned indirectly and primarily through your interactions with others. This course may be the first time you have ever formally studied nonverbal communication, but you have been studying verbal language in school for years. With nonverbal communication, you have learned nearly everything, from the meaning of particular nonverbal symbols to the structure of their use, informally throughout your lifetime as you have interacted with other people.

Cultural

Nonverbal communication is linked to cultural appropriateness (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Cultures vary on the meanings and appropriateness of nonverbal behaviors. In the United States, eye contact is often viewed as a display of courtesy, honesty, and respect. In other countries, making eye contact, especially with a superior, is considered improper and highly disrespectful. Further, many gestures are acceptable in some cultures but impolite or offensive in others. There also exists a host of cultural differences involving space, touch, time, and other nonverbal behaviors.

Personal

Nonverbal communication can be very personal. Similar to verbal communication, you develop your own personal meanings and use of nonverbal symbols. A person’s use of some nonverbal symbols may even become idiosyncratic over time. Some people may not like to hug or be hugged, for example. Others still may wear their hair in distinctive styles or wear unique clothing.

Multichanneled

Nonverbal communication can also be considered multichanneled. In other words, nonverbal communication can be conveyed through many channels. And, multiple nonverbal messages can be received at the same time through multiple sensory channels. Sight, sound, touch, smell, and even taste (an area of nonverbal communication not receiving much attention) can be used in various combinations or all together in the reception of nonverbal messages. The multichanneled
nature of nonverbal communication is beneficial because we often rely on accompanying nonverbal behaviors when assigning meanings to any single nonverbal message.

**Ambiguous**
Nonverbal communication is highly ambiguous, even more than the meaning of verbal communication. Indeed, the meaning of nonverbal communication is often unclear without additional information from context or communication frames. The ambiguous nature of communication can actually be valuable, though. When flirting, for instance, the associated nonverbal behaviors can mean many different things. Eye contact, a quick or sustained glance, a smile, or even a wink can be used either to flirt with someone or just to be friendly. Here, ambiguity is useful because it releases the pressure to receive the desired response. If the other person is interested, the response transacts your ambiguous message as flirtatious. If the other person is not interested, the response transacts your ambiguous behavior as “just being friendly” (Hall & Xing, 2015).

Although nonverbal communication is ambiguous, that does not mean that it is impossible to determine its meaning. You can more accurately interpret the meaning of nonverbal communication by recognizing that it occurs as part of a system and is related to other parts of an interaction. Table 5.3 examines four clues to consider when assigning meaning.

**Less Controlled**
Nonverbal communication is less subject to control than is verbal communication. You might be able to keep from calling someone you dislike a jerk, but nonverbally you may be expressing your displeasure unknowingly through dirty looks or changes in posture and distance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.3</th>
<th>Assigning Meaning to Nonverbal Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal Communication</strong></td>
<td>Nonverbal communication is understood in part by the verbal communication used with it. It can affect how words are understood, and words can affect how nonverbal communication is understood. Someone caressing your thigh and saying, “I love you” is doing something different than someone touching your thigh and saying, “Is this where it hurts?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Nonverbal Communication</strong></td>
<td>Any nonverbal communication has a relationship to other nonverbal communication that happens simultaneously. If someone is staring at you with a scowl and clenched fists, you can assume that the stare is intended as a threat; if the stare is accompanied by a smile and a soft expression, it is intended as friendly. Likewise, a smile accompanied by agitated gestures, sweating, or blushing probably means the person is nervous, but someone smiling and looking relaxed with an open posture is probably feeling friendly and confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical / Situational Context</strong></td>
<td>The interpretation of nonverbal communication depends on the physical context and situational context of the interaction. If someone stares at you in class, it feels different from a stare across a crowded singles bar. A scream at a sports match probably means your team just scored, but a scream in your home could indicate the discovery of a rodent.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td>How nonverbal communication is interpreted is also affected by your relationship to another person. If the person touching your thigh is a nurse, you’re probably right to assume that the touch is part of a treatment or medical exam, so stay there and get well. If the person is a stranger in a park, it’s time to leave—quickly.</td>
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Nonverbal behaviors often occur without your full awareness and reveal how you really feel or hidden information (Iwasaki, & Noguchi, 2016). This nonverbal betrayal of someone’s internal feelings is known as leakage. Because your spontaneous nonverbal communication is more difficult to control than your verbal communication, people are more likely to believe your nonverbal over your verbal messages—especially when the two are contradictory. People rely more on what you do than on what you say.

Continuous Nonverbal communication is continuous and ongoing. If nothing else, you will always be communicating nonverbally through your physical appearance. More to the point, when interacting face-to-face, you begin communicating nonverbally before you start talking and will continue communicating after you stop. You can stop communicating verbally, but you cannot stop communicating nonverbally.

The Functions of Nonverbal Communication
Nonverbal communication has many functions in everyday life, primarily in the transaction of meanings. Beyond the construction of meaning, though, nonverbal communication interconnects with verbal communication, regulates interactions, and identifies people. It also registers people’s emotional states or displays their attitudes about themselves, the other person in the interaction, or their comfort level. Nonverbal communication further establishes relational meaning and understanding.

Interconnects With Verbal Communication
One function of nonverbal communication involves its interconnection with verbal communication. Your interpretation of verbal meaning is often framed by accompanying nonverbal elements, such as tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures. Your nonverbal communication might repeat your verbal communication, sending a corresponding nonverbal message. For example, when you say hello to someone from across the room, you might wave at the same time.

Alternatively, nonverbal messages can substitute, or be used in place of, verbal messages. For example, you might just wave to acknowledge someone and not say anything.

Nonverbal communication is often used to emphasize or highlight the verbal message. If you have ever gone fishing and described “the one that got away” to your friends, you have no doubt used nonverbal communication to emphasize just how big that fish really was by holding your arms out wide to indicate its gargantuan length. A verbal message can also be emphasized through your tone of voice. When you tell someone a secret, for example, you may use a hushed voice to emphasize its private nature.

When nonverbal communication is used to moderate verbal communication, it plays down a verbal message. For instance, a doubtful tone of voice and the slight...
scrunching of your face and shoulders could indicate uncertainty. If your supervisor did this while saying, “I may be able to give you a raise this year,” you would probably not expect a raise. By moderating the verbal message nonverbally, your boss is letting you know there is uncertainty in that statement.

Your nonverbal communication can also contradict your verbal communication—sometimes intentionally, such as when you are being sarcastic (“Oh, nice job!” said angrily when someone spills coffee on you). Contradiction may occur unintentionally as well: for instance, when someone charges into a room, slams the door, sits down on the couch in a huff, and says “Oh, nothing” when you ask what is wrong. Contradiction is not always obvious, but you are generally skilled at detecting it—especially when you share a close, personal relationship with the speaker. Faced with contradiction, you will likely believe the person’s nonverbal over verbal communication. Why? (Hint: Spontaneous nonverbal communication is less subject to your control than is verbal communication.)

Regulates Interactions
Nonverbal communication also helps regulate interactions. Nonverbal communication aids in starting or ending interactions. It is also used to determine and establish turn taking during interactions, so that people know when it is their turn to speak, so that they can indicate a desire to speak, and so that they can encourage the other people to speak.

Nonverbal communication can indicate whether you will actually engage in conversation. If one of your friends walks past you at a rapid pace with an intense look on his or her face, it shows that he or she is in a hurry or not in the mood to talk. In this case, you might avoid interacting with your friend at this time. If someone looks frustrated or confused, however, you may decide to interact with him or her because the nonverbal behavior signals a need for help.

Nonverbal communication also assists in turn taking, which keeps interactions flowing and helps people avoid talking over one another. Through facial expression, vocal changes, and other nonverbal behaviors, people recognize when other people want them to take over the conversation, indicate to other people that they want to take over the conversation, and encourage other people to take over the conversation.

Nonverbal communication also signals the end to an interaction. You may, for example, stop talking, start to edge away, or show other signs of departure, such as looking away from the other person more often or checking the time on your phone or watch. When the interaction is coming to an end, speakers generally join in rituals of ending, such as stepping back, offering a handshake, or stating directly that it is time to go.

Identifies Individuals
Nonverbal communication also functions to identify specific individuals. Just as dogs know each other individually by smell, humans recognize one another specifically from facial appearance. You also use physical cues such as muscles, beards, skin color, breasts, and the color of a person’s hair to identify him or her as a particular sex, age, race, or athletic ability.
Clothing conveys someone’s sex or gender identity, personality (whether a person wears loud colors, sedate business attire, or punk clothing), favorite sports team, and job (police, military, security). Clothing can also identify changes in people, such as whether they have a special role today (prom outfits, wedding wear, gardening clothes).

People can also distinguish others’ scents: What perfume or cologne do they wear? Do they smoke? Are they drinkers? People often do not comment on these kinds of clues, but if your physician smells of alcohol, you may well identify him or her as professionally incompetent to deal with your health concerns.

**Transmits Emotional Information**

An additional function of nonverbal communication is to convey emotional information (Sanford, 2012). When you are angry, you scowl; when you are in love, you look gooey; when you feel happy, you smile. Nonverbal communication actually allows you to convey three different kinds of emotional information as follows.

**Attitude Toward the Other**

Nonverbal communication conveys your attitude toward the other person. If your facial expression conveys anxiety, viewers assume you are frightened. If your face looks relaxed and warm, viewers assume you are comfortable. If you care about what your instructor has to say, you fall silent when a lecture begins; talking in class (instructors’ biggest complaint about students) makes it difficult for people to hear but also shows lack of respect.

**Attitude Toward the Situation**

Nonverbal communication conveys your attitude toward the situation: Rapidly moving about while talking conveys a message of anxiety. Police officers often see fidgeting and an inability to maintain eye contact as indicators of a person’s guilt.

**Attitude Toward Yourself**

Nonverbal communication conveys information about your attitude toward yourself. If a person is arrogant, confident, or low in self-esteem, it is expressed through nonverbal behaviors. Arrogance shows up in nonverbal actions, such as facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact, and body posture. If someone stands up to his or her full height and faces you directly, you might assume that he or she is confident. Conversely, if he or she slouches and stares at the ground, you might assume that he or she is shy, lacks confidence, and is insecure.
Relational Meaning and Understanding
Nonverbal communication is a silent relational regulator. Your relationships with others inform your everyday communication, and your everyday communication develops relationships. Regulation of interactions controls engagement, politeness, coordination of action, and sense of pleasure in the interaction—all of which are ultimately relational in effect. The appearance of others enables you to distinguish and make judgments about them. Appearance also forms the basis of relational attraction. In fact, you often are attracted to people with facial and bodily features very similar to your own. Additionally, we also become aware of and promote changes in our relationships based on changes in nonverbal communication (Manusov, Docan-Morgan, & Harvey, 2015).

Types of Nonverbal Communication
Multiple types of nonverbal communication are used collectively in the construction and interpretation of meaning, the regulation of interactions, the development of identities, and the enactment of relationships. In what follows, we discuss types of nonverbal communication individually to provide a more detailed explanation, but keep in mind that nonverbal communication works as a whole system comprising all these elements.

Environment
When considering the environment as nonverbal communication, we can consider the natural or human-made surroundings in which communication takes place. The environmental context has a major impact on how people feel, how they behave, and how they communicate with one another. For instance, consider differences when dining at a fast-food restaurant versus an upscale restaurant. Through smells, colors, layout, seating, sounds, lighting, temperature, and even other environmental factors, fast-food restaurants have been designed so that people are more likely to be hungry and will eat quickly so that their space is freed up for other customers (Eaves & Leathers, 1991). Upscale restaurants manipulate those same environmental factors in different ways so that people might linger, so that they spend more money, and so that they are willing to spend more money because they are getting added value for their dining experience through comfort and décor.

Perceptions of Environment
Your perception of an environment will ultimately influence how you feel, how you behave, and how you interact with other people. Mark Knapp, Judith Hall, and Terrence Horgan (2014) have offered the following six dimensions of environments that influence our perceptions: (1) formality, (2) warmth, (3) privacy, (4) familiarity, (5) constraint, and (6) distance.
Formality
The formality dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as formal or informal. In other words, it involves whether you find a place to be serious and proper or relaxed and casual. Using the restaurant examples mentioned earlier, a fast-food restaurant is generally informal, so you might feel more relaxed, might not feel the need to dress nicely, and might not feel the need to speak softly when interacting with people. Conversely, an upscale restaurant might be perceived as more formal, so you might feel the need to behave more “properly,” dress more nicely, and hold conversations to a more quiet level.

Warmth
The warmth dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as welcoming, inviting, and comfortable. To an extent, this dimension might seem to overlap with formality because many people might feel more comfortable in an informal setting rather than a formal setting. However, some people may prefer more formal and structured settings over more informal and less regulated settings, so that is not necessarily always the case. A warm environment is any that you perceive as welcoming and comfortable, and that can vary for many people, although some businesses strive to make their locations just that to attract more customers.

Privacy
The privacy dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as secluded, where a person’s communication and activities are less apparent to unintended people. A sense of privacy might increase the likelihood that people will behave in ways, positive or negative, that they would not behave if other people could be watching them. It might also increase the possibility that someone will be willing to disclose more personal information than he or she would be if other people could overhear the conversation.

Familiarity
The familiarity dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as known. A sense of familiarity generally leads to comfort. Consider how you felt when first being on campus. Much of campus was probably unknown, which may very well have increased the nervousness you might have been experiencing. As your campus surroundings became more familiar, you likely felt more comfortable than you originally felt when there were so many unknowns. Chain stores such as Target and Walmart use familiarity to their advantage to encourage people to visit and to shop. When entering such chain stores, no matter where you find yourself and even if you have not been to that particular location, you can generally expect to find the same layout as any other location of that store you have been to in the past. Such familiarity, and subsequent comfort, increases the likelihood that you will shop there and spend your money.

Constraint
The constraint dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as restricting movement. Being constrained is sometimes uncomfortable.
for people, but many public places use constraint to manage people’s movements. IKEA stores, for example, are notoriously but effectively maze-like, channeling people through the entire store and making it very difficult to skip any area. Plus, because it does seem so confusing and thinking they might not make it back to a particular area, people are likely to pick up items along the way, even if they are not certain they want to buy them. Once something is in a cart or in hand, a person becomes more likely to buy that item.

**Distance**

The distance dimension deals with the extent to which an environment is perceived as enabling a person to be near to or far from another person or objects. The distance between people can greatly affect behavior and comfort. For instance, when people are standing in close proximity in such confined spaces as elevators, busses, or subways, they are more likely to avert their eyes and avoid interaction. Conversely, when people are positioned farther apart for whatever reason, they might find it difficult to interact, even if they desire to do so. This issue is something to keep in mind when considering the next type of nonverbal communication, proxemics.

**Proxemics**

Proxemics is the study of space and distance in communication. The occupation of space and the distance you maintain from others conveys messages about control, acceptance, and relationships. We will begin our discussion with territoriality and then talk about personal space and distance.

**Skills You Can Use: Arranging Your Space**

Your arrangement of the space in your interaction can make another person feel more comfortable or less comfortable and make that person feel more in control or less in control. Consider ways in which the arrangement of space that you control can be adjusted according to the types of relationships you want to achieve when people enter your space.

**Territoriality**

The need to establish space as your own is somewhat of a human need. Territoriality is the establishment and maintenance of space that people claim for their personal use. Irwin Altman (1975) points out three types of territory that you may establish: primary, secondary, and public. Primary territory is space that you own or have principal control over. This space is central to your life and includes such spaces as your house, room, apartment, office, or car. How you maintain and control this space communicates a great deal to those around you. Decorating your home in a particular fashion provides you with a sense of comfort.
and informs others about the type of person you may be or the types of interests you may have. Even in dorm rooms, though they are generally less than spacious, roommates find ways to assert ownership of “their” areas (Erlandson, 2012).

You establish secondary territory as your own through repeated use, even if it is space that is not central to your life or exclusive to you. A good example of secondary territory is the room where your class is held. Chances are pretty good that you and your fellow students sit in the exact same seats that you sat in on the first day of class. Even though this space does not belong to you, others associate it with you because of repeated use. Accordingly, if you came to class one day and someone was sitting in “your” seat, you might get upset or uncomfortable if you were forced to sit elsewhere.

Public territory is space open to everyone but available for your sole temporary occupancy once established as such. These spaces might include park benches, seats in a movie theater, and tables at a library. Secondary and public territory can involve the same type of physical space, such as a table at a restaurant, so consider the following example. If you go to the same restaurant every day for lunch and always sit at the same table, eventually it will become your secondary territory. Although it is open to everyone, once you claim that space for your temporary use, you assume exclusive control over it for the time being and would not expect anyone to violate that.

There are numerous cultural variations in the use of public territory. In the United States, for example, if you and your date went to a restaurant and were seated at a table for four, the two additional seats would remain empty regardless of whether other people were waiting to be seated. In many European countries, however, it would not be surprising if another couple you do not know is eventually seated at your table.

Territoriality and Relationships. Our use of territory can be used to indicate and perform relationships. For example, inviting someone into our primary territory might be used to display or create feelings of closeness or intimacy. However, denying someone entry into our primary territory could specify that such feelings are not recognized or desired.

Our use of territory can also be used in the construction of leadership or power roles. A formal chair of a meeting sits at one end of the table, usually in a special seat, and everyone else lines up along the length of the table at right angles to the chair. In contrast, a more secure or less formal leader might sit anywhere at the table. From seemingly minor physical facts about the distribution and use of space, then, you can determine relational information about the people in a setting—who is in charge and who is not—as well as the leader’s preferred style of interaction, formal or informal.

Marking Our Territory. People use markers to establish and announce their territory, and these markers are surprisingly effective. People mark space by putting their “stuff” on it. Markers are common when using public territory that is open and unrestricted. For example, when you lay a jacket over the back of a chair,
you have claimed that chair. Should someone want to move the chair, he or she would probably ask your permission rather than simply removing the jacket and taking the chair. Markers are often used to indicate privacy and control, and you feel uncomfortable if someone else enters the space without permission. People meet this “invasion” with varying degrees of disapproval, but blood pressure frequently goes up.

**Personal Space and Distance**

You carry around with you an idea of how much actual space you should have during an interaction. This idea will be affected by your status, your sex, and your liking for the person with whom you are talking. It also will be affected by the situations in which you find yourself. **Personal space** refers to that space legitimately claimed or occupied by a person for the time being.

All of us have a **body buffer zone**, a kind of imaginary aura that we regard as part of ourselves. People differ in the sizes of their body buffer zones. If you step into the body buffer zone that someone feels is his or her “space,” even if it is beyond what you would normally expect, you may be in for trouble. Your friends and family can enter your body buffer zone more freely than can other people. You react to space and its use depending on the kind of situation in which you find yourself.

An early pioneer of personal space research, E. T. Hall (1966) distinguished among intimate distance (contact to 18 inches), personal distance (18–48 inches), social distance (48–144 inches), and public distance (12–25 feet). Although valuable, this early research does not explain cultural differences. For instance, it has become accepted that people from Latino and Arab cultures require less space for each type of encounter than do Northern Europeans and North Americans. Nevertheless, these types of personal space are frequently referenced when discussing space and distance and are illustrated in Figure 5.1.

**Space, Distance, and Relationships**

The meaning of space or distance is framed by your relationships with others. What it means for someone to stand mere inches away from you will differ depending on whether he or she is a friend, an adversary, or a complete stranger. Close friends are literally closer to you—people generally stand closer to people they like. Similarly, a friend moving the backpack you placed on a table to sit near you would mean something entirely different than a complete stranger doing the same thing.
Your use of space and distance enacts these relationships. Subordinate individuals tend to give more space to individuals in leadership positions. An employee, for example, would stand at a greater distance when talking with an employer than with a coworker, indicating the superior–subordinate nature of that relationship and enabling both interactants to perform their respective roles.

Space and distance also allow relational negotiation to take place. For instance, a friend who desires a more intimate relationship with you may begin standing a bit closer to gauge your reaction. Similarly, a subordinate decreasing the amount of space granted to a superior may be indicating a desire for a more equal relationship. Either attempt could be accepted or rejected depending on the other person’s view of the relationship. Such relational negotiation frequently takes place in families once adolescent sons or daughters start to claim bedrooms as their own space that is now private from invasive parents.

Kinesics

Kinesics refers to movement of the face and body that takes place during an interaction. Movement of the face and body can involve arm and hand movements, walking, sitting, standing, and facial expression. In what follows, we will discuss common categories of kinesic behavior and then specifically examine facial expression.

Categories of Kinesic Behavior

Although originally published nearly a half century ago, the following five types of kinesic behavior described by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen (1969) continue to be used by nonverbal communication scholars: (1) emblems, (2) illustrators, (3) affect displays, (4) regulators, and (5) adaptors.

Emblems are not related to speech in the sense that they do not help illustrate what is being said, although they may clarify what a person means. Consider conductors directing bands and orchestras, police officers directing traffic, and coaches signaling plays. Emblems can nevertheless be translated into verbal expressions; for example, you recognize that bouncing the palm of your hand off your forehead means “How stupid of me! Why didn’t I think of it before?”

Illustrators are directly related to speech as it is being spoken and are used to visualize or emphasize its content. For example, turning your palm down and then rotating it as you describe how to unscrew a bottle cap is an illustrator, and scrunching up your face while saying, “This tastes disgusting,” is an illustrator using facial expression.

Affect displays are nonverbal expressions of emotion. When a person is expressing an emotion, the face will provide information about the exact emotion being expressed, and the body will provide information about its extent. You could, for example, be angry and scowling while your body is fairly loose and fluid, indicating low-intensity anger. However, you could be scowling, holding your body tight and rigid, and almost shaking, which would indicate great anger and tell others to use their knowledge of proxemics to give you plenty of space!

Regulators are nonverbal actions that indicate to others how you want them to behave or what you want them to do. One familiar regulator occurs at the end of most college classes: Students begin closing their books and gathering their belongings to
signal to the instructor that it is time to end class. Other regulators include shivering when you want someone to close the window or turn up the heat, a look of frustration or confusion when you need help with a problem, and a closed-off posture (arms folded, legs crossed) when you want to be left alone.

**Adaptors** are nonverbal behaviors used to satisfy personal needs. Generally, these behaviors focus on a need to increase comfort or manage tension. For instance, when experiencing nervousness, a person may shake one or both legs while seated to release nervous energy. Of course, an adaptor can also be as simple as scratching an itch. Did you just experience the need to scratch an itch after reading the previous sentence and now this one? If you scratched it, you just used an adaptor.

**Facial Expression**

As mentioned earlier, our faces convey emotional information to others. Sometimes one’s display of emotion is a natural expression, but other times the display of emotion is modified based on appropriateness of the situation. In the same piece by Ekman and Friesen (1969) where kinesic categories were offered, the following four types of facial management were also provided: (1) deintensification, (2) overintensification, (3) neutralization, and (4) masking.

**Deintensification** is a form of facial management in which the intensity of an emotional display is lessened. Consider a time when you might be excited about something but did not want to appear too excited. Or, perhaps you were saddened or upset but did not want to convey how strongly you were experiencing these feelings. In some instances, exhibiting too much emotion might be culturally inappropriate. In other instances, people may avoid showing too much emotion to avoid gender stereotypes (Brescoll, 2016).

The reverse of deintensification, **overintensification** is a form of facial management in which the intensity of an emotional display is increased. In this case, think about a situation when someone gave you a present about which you were less than thrilled. You appreciated the gesture, but a donation made in your name to the Save the Snails fund is not something you particularly like. You did not want to hurt this person’s feelings, so you perhaps smiled a bit more than you would otherwise when offering thanks for the gift.

**Neutralization** is a form of facial management in which displays of emotion are nonexistent or quickly erased. This technique could be thought of as a blank expression or a poker face. Anytime you do not want someone to know how you are feeling, neutralization may be used.

Neutralization involves a lack of emotional display, whereas **masking** is a form of facial management in which the emotion displayed is the opposite of that being experienced. If you have ever been in competition and lost, for example, you might smile and act as if you are happy for the winner, when in reality you are upset and perhaps even angry about the decision.

**Eye Contact and Gaze**

**Eye contact** refers to the extent to which someone looks directly into the eyes of another person. In the United States, someone who “looks you in the eye” while talking is generally seen as reliable and honest. Conversely, someone with shifty eyes is treated as suspicious and untrustworthy. **Gaze**—distinguished from eye contact, where both interactants look at each other—describes one person looking at another and, most of the time, is seen as rewarding.
Most people generally like to be looked at when they are talking to someone else. In fact, if you gaze at a speaker and smile or nod approvingly, you will probably find that the speaker pays more attention to you, looks toward you more often, and engages in eye contact with you. (However, this is a culturally relative point, and in Eastern cultures, eye contact is disrespectful and an inferior in the hierarchy should look away from a superior. In this case, gaze aversion is a sign of respect.)

Although most eye contact is positive, it can also convey negative messages. A wide-eyed stare can convey disbelief or a threat. Years ago, Phoebe Ellsworth, Merrill Carlsmith, and Alexander Henson (1972) stood at the intersections of roads and stared at some drivers and not others. Those who were stared at tended to drive away more speedily, suggesting that a stare is a threatening stimulus for flight. Gaze can therefore be threatening and negative as much as it can be enticing and positive.

Some people (shy people, for example), afraid that others will evaluate them negatively, tend to decrease eye contact (Bradshaw, 2006), which cuts out negative inputs from other people. For shy people, this is a distinct advantage, but it also reduces the amount of information they can gather about a listener's reaction to what they say. Many outsiders assume that decreased eye contact is evidence of other social flaws, such as deception, so a shy person who avoids eye contact through fear of feedback may eventually create an impression of being shifty and unreliable.

Eye contact is also used to regulate interactions. Some characteristic patterns of eye movements go along with talk in conversations to regulate its flow. The speaker tends to look at the listener at the start and end of sentences (or paragraphs, if the speaker is telling a longer tale) but may look away during the middle parts. A listener who wishes to speak will tend to look hard at the present speaker, and a person asking a question will look right at the person to whom it is directed, maintaining his or her gaze while awaiting a reply. Listeners look at speakers more consistently than speakers look at listeners. When giving a speech to a group or large audience, it is important that you look at your audience (rather than at your notes) most of the time and distribute your gaze around the room, looking both left and right.

Interaction is further regulated through use of eye contact to manage turn taking, a kind of eye-based “over and out.” In cultures where simultaneous speech is taken as a sign of impoliteness, rather than of active and desirable involvement in the interaction, eye contact is used to end or yield a turn (a speaker looks longer toward the audience at the end of sentences), as well as to request a turn (a listener establishes longer eye contact with a speaker to signal willingness to enter the conversation). You leave a conversation by breaking off eye contact (typically 45 seconds before departure) and then, when the talking stops, turning toward an exit.

**ANALYZING EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION**

**Texting and Computer-Mediated Communication**

In a later chapter devoted to media and technology (Chapter 13), we discuss the impact of technology on nonverbal communication and vice versa. For instance, when talking with someone by text, e-mail, or instant message, confusion is more likely to happen because such nonverbal aspects as tone of voice and facial expression are not available to the receiver in the assigning of meanings. So, a person might write something sarcastically or jokingly, but it is understood as serious. Examine previous texts, e-mails, and instant messages you have been sent and have received.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Has the lack of nonverbal cues ever resulted in misunderstanding when you interacted through texts, e-mails, and instant messages?
2. What are some of the ways that you and the people with whom you have interacted managed the lack of nonverbal cues?
Vocalics

Vocalics, sometimes called paralanguage, refers to vocal characteristics that provide information about how verbal communication should be interpreted and about how you are feeling and even about yourself. When being sarcastic, your tone of voice will let others know if they should evaluate your words as serious or as part of a joke. The tone of your voice might be strained when you are angry or high-pitched when you are anxious. You can recognize some people you know simply by the sound of their voices. You can even tell things about people you do not know based on the sound of their voices. The voice can provide information about a person’s place of origin, age, and sex. The sound of someone’s voice also affects perceptions of his or her credibility and attractiveness.

Pitch involves the highness or lowness of a person’s voice. If you want to get technical, it involves the frequency of sound waves that are produced when you speak. Higher pitches produce more sound waves than lower pitches. Some people speak naturally at very high pitches, whereas other people speak in lower tones. People often use changes in the pitch of their voices to emphasize the parts of a sentence that they think are the most important.

Rate is how fast or slow you speak, generally determined by how many words you speak per minute. People average around 150 words per minute when speaking, but differences certainly exist among individuals. When an instructor wants you to pay special attention to what is being said, he or she might slow down so you realize the importance of the point. Someone who speaks too fast is likely to be treated as nervous or possibly shy. In everyday life, where people are relaxed among friends, their speech rate tends to be lively and fluent rather than stilted or halting. In stressful circumstances, however, their speech rates may be hesitant or uneven.

Volume is the loudness or softness of a person’s voice. Like variations in pitch and rate, some people naturally speak louder or softer than others do. When speaking, changes in volume can provide emphasis to your words by indicating importance or poignancy. Increases and decreases in volume can also convey emotional feeling.

Silence, or the meaningful lack of any sound, is a surprising part of vocalics. You may have heard the seemingly contradictory phrases “Silence is golden” and “Silence is deadly.” Depending on cultural, contextual, and relational factors, both of these phrases can be true. Most people in the United States—especially on a date or in an interview—meet silence or a prolonged break in conversation with discomfort. In other cultures, prolonged silence is not only tolerable but also may be expected. Silence can indicate embarrassment, anxiety, or lack of preparation as well as shyness, confusion, or disrespect. It can also be used to show anger or frustration, such as when you give someone the “silent treatment.” Silence can also be an indication of relational comfort, that people do not feel pressured to keep the conversation going.

Vocalics and Relationships

This brings us to the use of vocalics and relationships. Howard Giles (2008) shows that people can indicate their membership in a particular group by the way they use vocalic nonverbal behavior. For instance, if you are from the South, you might use a heavier accent in your conversation with others from your state or region, but you might tone down your accent when talking to people from the Northeast. Where people want to maintain a distance from the person they are talking to,
they will diverge, or hang on to differences in accent. When they want to become closer to the other person, they will tend to converge, or match their way of talking to the other person’s. You may notice yourself copying the speech styles of people you like. Sally Farley, Susan Hughes, and Jack LaFayette (2013) found that people’s voices change when talking with a romantic partner and that other people can also distinguish whether someone is talking with a romantic partner or a friend based solely on the sound of the person’s voice.

Chronemics

**Chronemics** encompasses use and evaluation of time in your interactions, including the location of events in time. Time might not be something that immediately comes to mind when thinking about nonverbal communication. However, consider what time might convey. For instance, a person might express a position of power by making someone wait, or unintentionally express being incompetent or inconsiderate by doing the same. Moreover, the significance of a romantic encounter can often be determined by when it occurs. You might see a lunch date as less meaningful than a late-night candlelit dinner. Whether you are meeting for lunch or dinner, however, your meal will have a time structure and pattern. You probably have the salad before the ice cream.

Chronemics also involves the duration of events. Boring lectures seem to last forever. You may also have had the experience that people often end their college romances after about 18 months or during the spring semester, when one partner might be graduating or going away for the summer. You are quite likely to comment if you run into someone whom you have not seen for “a-a-a-ges.” Also, you would probably feel the need to apologize if you left an e-mail unanswered for too long, did not answer a text message, or were late for an appointment.

Cultural differences in attitudes toward time also exist; some cultures especially value timely completion of tasks over attention to relationships, respect, or status, but others place the priorities exactly in reverse, feeling that it is discourteous to get down to the task before taking plenty of time to create a good relational atmosphere first.

Haptics

**Haptics** is the study of the specific nonverbal behaviors involving touch. These days there is also “haptic technology,” and the ability to touch, enlarge, and swipe your smartphone screen is one of the newer developments. When people get into your personal space, they will likely make actual physical contact with your most
personal possession, your body. Touch is used as a greeting to start an interaction (a handshake or a kiss) and in ceremonies, whether baptism, the confirming laying on of hands, holding a partner’s hands while making wedding vows, or as a means of congratulation from a simple handshake to a pat on the back to those piles of players who form on top of someone who made a game-winning score or play in sports.

Touch can be categorized according to type and meaning. R. Heslin (1974) noted that touch, of which there are many different types, has many different functions, as shown in Table 5.4. These forms of touch show positive feelings, but each could also produce negative feelings: Someone you feel close to shakes your hand instead of hugging you, or someone you are not close to tries to hug you. Stanley Jones and Elaine Yarbrough (1985) went a bit further to present the meanings association with touch, as shown in Table 5.5. Notice that this list focuses on more than just the potentially positive attributes of touch.

### Table 5.4  Heslin’s (1974) Functions of Touch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional/professional</td>
<td>Touch is permitted by the context—for example, during a medical exam, someone you hardly know may touch parts of your body that even your best friend has never seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/polite</td>
<td>Touch is formal—for example, a handshake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship/warmth</td>
<td>Touch is an expression of regard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love/intimacy</td>
<td>Touch is special, permitted only with those with whom you are close.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.5  Jones and Yarbrough’s (1985) Meanings of Touch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Affect</td>
<td>Touch is used to convey support, appreciation, inclusion, sexual attraction, and affection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playful</td>
<td>Touch involves playful affection or playful aggression, such as roughhousing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Touch is used to gain compliance, gain attention, or invoke a response from someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualistic</td>
<td>Touch is used when greeting someone or when departing from someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Touch is used when greeting someone or when departing from someone, while also expressing affections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-related</td>
<td>Touch is used to get something done, often in the process of providing a service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>Touch is unintentional and potentially meaningless.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross-Cultural Touch

Psychologist Sidney Jourard (1971) observed and recorded how many times couples in cafés casually touched each other in an hour. The highest rates were in Puerto Rico (180 times per hour) and Paris (110 times per hour). Guess how many times per hour couples touched each other in the mainland United States? Twice! (In London, it was zero. They never touched.) Jourard also found that French parents and children touched each other three times more frequently than did American parents and children.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. It is always a good idea to think critically about research. Although these might be interesting findings about cultural differences related to touch, do you think the same rates of touch would be found today?
2. Regardless of the date, do you think one person’s observations in cafés can legitimately be used to make claims about cultural differences of touch?
FOCUS QUESTIONS REVISITED

1. **What are some common misconceptions about nonverbal communication?**

Contrary to common belief by some people, 93% of meaning is not conveyed nonverbally, universal understanding of nonverbal communication does not exist, deception cannot always be detected nonverbally, and nonverbal communication is not something a person reads.

2. **What is nonverbal communication?**

Nonverbal communication is everything that communicates a message but does not include words. Nonverbal communication is (a) symbolic, (b) encoded and decoded, (c) both dynamic and static, (d) guided by rules, (e) cultural, (f) personal, (g) multichanneled, (h) ambiguous, (i) less controlled than verbal communication, and (j) continuous.

3. **How does nonverbal communication interconnect with verbal communication?**

Nonverbal communication can repeat, substitute, emphasize, moderate, and contradict verbal communication.

4. **How does nonverbal communication regulate interactions?**

Nonverbal communication regulates interaction by initiating interactions, enabling turn taking, and defining when interactions have reached their end. It does this through eye movements, vocalics, and gestures, among other things.

5. **How does nonverbal communication identify people?**

Physical appearance, voice, clothing, and even smell can be used to identify people.

6. **How does nonverbal communication transmit emotional information?**

Nonverbal communication actually allows you to convey three different kinds of emotional information: attitudes toward the other person, attitudes toward the situation, and attitudes toward yourself.

7. **What are the most common types of nonverbal communication?**

Common types of nonverbal communication include the following: (a) environment, (b) proxemics, (c) territoriality, (d) kinesics, (e) eye contact and gaze, (f) vocalics, (g) chronemics, and (h) haptics.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FRIENDS

1. Ask your friends how good they believe themselves to be at determining when other people are not telling the truth.
2. Ask your friends whether they think they could get away with telling you a lie.
3. Ask your friends whether they can tell when you are embarrassed or uncomfortable even though you might not tell them. What nonverbal behaviors inform them of your embarrassment or discomfort?

MEDIA CONNECTIONS

1. Look for television news stories involving police putting people into cars. What percentage of police touch the person’s head? In what other circumstances, if any, do people open the car door for someone else and then touch the head of the person getting in? What do you think is being conveyed?
2. How many news stories can you find where a fight got started because someone felt another person was “looking at him in a funny way” or infringing on his personal space?
3. How do television shows use the placement of furniture to add something to the story?

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